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BUDDHISM.

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THE contrast between the rapidity with which Buddhism, in the early centuries of its history, spread over all adjoining lands, and its apparent inertness in these later centuries is very striking. We are only just beginning to gather the facts as to its original progress. And modern Buddhists are not in the habit of making any parade of their intentions, or even of their hopes. Any attempt, therefore, to explain this contrast, or to form a judgment as to whether it is likely, or not, to be permanent is beset with difficulty, and must be subject to revision.

It will not be without interest, however, to state shortly what is at present known on the matter, and to refer to some of those points which will be important, or at least suggestive, in any ultimate decision.

There are, of course, no statistics available as to the number of the adherents of the reforming movement in the early days of Buddhism. But the ground had been well prepared. Gotama, the Buddha, was careful in all his discourses to build on foundations already laid. He not only claimed to be, but in fact was, for the most part, a teacher who took up and emphasized the best teaching of the past. On certain points only were his doctrines new. The most important and far reaching of these points was his ignoring the then universally accepted theory of a soul; that is, of a vague and subtle, but real and material, entity supposed to reside during life within the body, and to fly out, at death, usually through a hole at the top of the head, to continue its existence, as a separate and conscious individual, elsewhere. We know for certain that this position, the refusal to use this hypothesis, was, among Indian thinkers, peculiar to Buddhism.

On other points we must still be content to reserve our judgment. The Buddha, for instance, is sometimes said to have abolished caste. But we are entirely unwarranted in supposing the system we now call the caste system to have existed in its present form when Buddha arose, in the sixth century before Christ, in the valley of the Ganges. On the contrary, the keystone of the arch of the peculiarly Indian caste organization—the absolute supremacy of the Brahmins—had not yet been put in position, had not, in fact, been made ready. And in many other details the caste system did not yet exist. It was only in process of evolution. In face of these conditions, the Buddha's doctrine was necessarily two-fold. Within his own order, over which alone he had complete control, he ignored completely and absolutely all advantages or disadvantages arising from birth, occupation, or social status, and swept away all barriers and disabilities arising from the arbitrary rules of mere ceremonial or social impurity. Now, we know there had existed orders before Gotama founded his. But their records are at present available only in so fragmentary a state that we do not yet know whether any of them had taken a similar step before.

On the other hand, outside his own order, the Buddha adopted, as regards what we may now fairly call "questions of caste," the only course then open to any man of sense—that is to say, he strove to influence public opinion (on which such observances depend) by a constant inculcation of reasonable views. Thus, in the *Amagandha Sutta* it is laid down, in eloquent words, that defilement does not come from eating this or that, prepared or given by this or that person, but from folly in deed or word or thought. And here the very document itself, in giving the doctrine, gives it as the word of an Awakened One (a Buddha) of old. In other words, the Buddhist records put forward this view as having been enunciated long before, with the intended implication that it was common ground to the wise.

This is only one example out of many. The Buddhist doctrines that salvation from suffering, from mere quantitative existence indefinitely prolonged, depended on the choice of a right ideal; that goodness was a function of intelligence; that the sacrifice of the heart was better than a sacrifice of bullocks; that the ideal of man was to be sought, not in birth or wealth or rank, but in wisdom and goodness; that the habitual practice of the rap-

ture of deep reverie was a useful means of ethical training, of acquiring that intellectual insight on which self culture depends; a great part of the theory of the origin of evil; a great part of the theory of Karma; the fundamental doctrine of the impermanency of all phenomena; the spirit of unquestioning toleration in all matters of religion and speculation—all these, and others besides, were pre-Buddhistic, and were widely held when Buddhism arose. Even the doctrine that salvation can be obtained in this life was pre-Buddhistic. The Buddha merely added that it could only be enjoyed in this life, that there was no salvation at all beyond the grave.

There was no organized church to attack. It was taken as granted, indeed, that the knowledge of the magic, the mystery, of sacrifice was confined to Brahmins, but the majority of the Brahmins, then as now, followed other pursuits. They were land-owners, officials, even traders. Many of them openly adopted, more of them were in favor of, the new school. And the new school itself was no organized body. No one, unless he actually became a member of Gotama's order, as a considerable number of Brahmins actually did, had to make any break in his life, had to lose any social consideration, by following, in whole or in part, the party of reform.

The economic conditions were peculiarly favorable. And there was present a factor almost indispensable to any new movement of religious reform—the existence side by side of widely differing views of life. Just as our Reformation in Europe was largely due to the influence on Christian minds of the newly discovered pagan literature of Greece, so in India, in the sixth century before Christ, the Aryans were in contact with views of life fundamentally different from their own. It is a great mistake to imagine that the invading Aryans found only savages in the land. The Dravidian civilization was not inferior to, though it was, no doubt, in many respects, different from that of the Aryans themselves. There was probably never a time in the history of the world, either before or since, when so large a proportion of all classes of the people over so extensive a country were possessed by so earnest a spirit of inquiry, of speculation, of interest in religious questions, by so impartial and deep a respect for all who posed as teachers of the truth. And there is no doubt about the enthusiasm of the new converts, though it was an enthusiasm of a pe-

culiar kind. Almost all were filled with an overpowering reverence and love for their great teacher. Many had experienced, and would never forget, the bliss, the rapture of the moments of insight, of emancipation, of elevation when they realized, in their systematic practice of the reveries of Jhâna, the impermanence of all phenomena. The related episodes reveal a calm confidence arising from the sense of self-mastery won, a keen intellectual pleasure in what seemed to them to be a final solution of the deepest problems of life, a longing sympathy with those blinded by folly and error. And the last of these feelings they were wont to cultivate especially by one of their systematic meditations.

Such are some of the considerations that help us to understand the original spread of Buddhism. Those who have found it difficult to reconcile the undoubted fact of that spread with their view of Buddhism as the apotheosis of annihilation, meaning thereby the annihilation of the soul, are wrong only in the latter half of their contention. As is now well known Nirvana does not mean the annihilation of the soul—the Buddhists did not accept the hypothesis of a soul—but the dying out, in the heart, of the three fell fires of lust, ill-will and delusion. A doctrine of salvation to be gained, and gained now, by self-mastery, by a gradual inward perfection, may have been very different from modern Western ideas, but was quite compatible with the necessary enthusiasm, and appealed strongly to the aspirations of the day.

What we know is that the success of the new doctrine was, in the first centuries, sufficiently marked. Its extent may be gauged by the account of the formal sending forth of missionaries at the close of Asoka's Council, held at Patna in the third century before Christ. They were sent to Sind, to Afghanistan, to Kashmir, to Tibet and Nepal, to the coasts of Burma, to the Dekkan, to Ceylon. In other words missionaries were no longer needed in the vast extent of territory from the Indus to the Gulf of Bengal, from the Himalayas to the Godavari River. And in the following centuries Buddhism had spread west to the Oxus, north to Mongolia, east to China, Korea and Japan, and south to Siam and to Java and to other islands of the far Southeastern Archipelago.

Then came the decline. Outside India, no further progress was made. In India itself the force of the new movement gradually fell away, until Buddhism, like Christianity, became almost unknown, even in the very land of its birth.

What were the reasons for this? Chiefly, no doubt, of two kinds—internal weakness and a notable increase in the power of opposing conditions. The very event which, in the eyes of the world, seemed to be the most striking proof of the success of the reforming party, the conversion and strenuous support of Asoka, the most powerful ruler India had had—indeed the first real over-lord over practically the whole of India proper—was only the beginning of the end. The adhesion of large numbers of only nominal converts produced weakness rather than strength. The day of compromise had come. Every relaxation of the old thorough-going position was heartily welcomed and widely supported by converts only half converted. The margin of difference between the Buddhists and their most formidable opponents faded gradually, almost entirely, away. The soul-theory, step by step, regained the upper hand. Caste distinctions were, little by little, built up into a completely organized system. The social supremacy of the Brahmins by birth became accepted everywhere as an incontrovertible fact. But the flood of popular superstition which overwhelmed the Buddhist movement overwhelmed also the whole pantheon of the Vedic Gods. Buddhism and Brahminism practically gave place to modern Hinduism.

We ought not, in fact, to be surprised that a theory which placed the ideal in self-conquest; regarded final salvation as obtainable in this world only, and only by self-culture; a view of life that ignored the "soul," and brought the very gods under the domain of law; a religion which aimed its keenest shafts against just those forms of belief in the supernatural that appeal most strongly alike to the hopes and the fears of the people; a philosophy based on experience, confining itself to going back, step by step, from effect to cause, and pouring scorn on speculations as to the ultimate origin, or end of things—we ought not to be surprised that such a system stumbled and fell. It might gain, by the powerful personality of its founders, by the first enthusiasm, the zeal and the intelligence of his followers, a certain measure of temporary success. But it fought against too many vested interests at once, it raised up too many enemies, it tried, in "pouring new wine into old bottles," to retain too much of the ancient phraseology for lasting success. It was before its time. The end was inevitable. And the end was brought about, not by persecution, but by the gradual weakening of the theory itself, the

gradual creeping back under new forms and new names of the more popular beliefs.

In almost the words the present writer ventured to use, nearly twenty years ago, "It would be, perhaps, hard to find, in the whole history of the world, a greater tragedy than that typified by the feast of Juggernaut. The number of deaths at the festival has doubtless been sometimes exaggerated, and I am quite aware that reasons can be given for the character of the carvings on the triumphal car of Vishnu. But it is acknowledged that the temple at Puri had once been Buddhist, that caste is ignored during the festival, and that the very name of the idol is really nothing but a misunderstood ancient epithet—the Pali word 'Jagan-natha' (Lord of the World)—of the great thinker and reformer of India. We know that deaths did, in fact, and up to very recent times, take place, and were supposed to secure a happy entrance of the "soul" into realms of delight in heaven. When we call to mind how the frenzied multitudes, drunk with the luscious poison of delusions, from which the reformation they had rejected might have saved them, dragged on that sacred car, heavy and hideous with carvings of obscenity and cruelty—dragged it on in the very name of Jagan-natha, the forgotten teacher of self-control, of enlightenment and of universal love, while it creaked and crushed over the bodies of miserable suicides, the victims of once exploded superstitions—it will help us to realize how heavy is the hand of the immeasurable past; how much more powerful than the voice of the prophets is the influence of congenial fancies, and of inherited beliefs."

And now? Is there any probability of the revival of Buddhism? Has it force enough, has it any force to stand up against the altered conditions of the world? Beaten back by the fire and sword of a fierce Mohammedanism from Khiva and Bokhara, from Afghanistan and Baluchistan, from Sind and from the Panjab, will it regain there the lost territory, and restore the beautiful monuments so ruthlessly destroyed? It was the same gentle hands that gave the *coup de grâce* to Buddhism in the valley of the Ganges. The great university of Nâlandâ still existed, as the chief if not the only centre of unsectarian religious life in India when the Moslems came.

They murdered the teachers and burnt the books, and, without any military necessity that is now perceptible, destroyed the

buildings. Can Buddhism recover there the ground it had previously lost by its own failings, and rebuild the great university now buried in heaps of ruin and covered with jungle? Can it recover its lost influence in China and Japan, where it was for a short time the dominant faith, and is now despised, again through its own weakness, by the official and ruling classes who once professed it? Is there any probability of its once again sending out its missionaries into distant lands, and gaining over new regions to its strong gospel of self-victory by self-abnegation?

The answer, so far as it can be given at all, can only be given in the light of the history of the past. In so far as it shall be able to purify itself by an intelligent approximation, indeed, by a practical return, to the teaching of the Master, there is hope for it. Its most powerful weapon, now as then, must always be the Four Truths, the Noble Path in which they culminate, the doctrine of Arahatsip to which that path leads up. It is by no means sure that Buddhists throughout the world have as yet fully and consciously reached this position. But some approach, at least, to it is being brought about by two causes especially. And these are both due, oddly enough, to European and American agency—they are the influence of Christian propagandists and of European and American scholars.

One result of the first has been, and especially in those countries where it has been most vigorously carried on, to compel the Buddhists to examine their grounds of belief, and, with that object, to study more carefully their ancient literature. We see, therefore, throughout the Buddhist world an enthusiasm reawakening for education, both primary and secondary, to be conducted on their own lines. Books in manuscript, on the time-honored palm leaves, had been deemed enough when their position was not attacked. Now they are printing and circulating their books, as the Christians do; they are founding schools for both sexes; they are establishing boards of education, even high schools and colleges; and their sacred books, no longer left only in the hands of student recluses, are printed and circulated at large. *Fas est ab hoste doceri.*

On the other hand, the labors of European and American scholars are making accessible, also on this side, the ancient texts, and are even beginning to translate them into European languages, and to analyze and summarize their contents. Though

the Buddhists do not in the least agree with us, whose aim is not controversial at all, but only historical, they are beginning not only to make such use as suits them of our results, but to imitate our methods.

It may be desirable to specify, with regard to each country—for Buddhism is still an influence over widely separated portions of the globe, and the present position is different in each—how far such movements have gone. In Japan, split up as Buddhism is into many sects, of which Mr. Fujish Ma has given us so interesting an account,* the very difference of opinion has led to one sect vying with the other in propagandist education. Several of them have even sent students over to Europe for the express purpose of learning Pali and Sanskrit—a most striking phenomenon of the time. And one or two of these students, thus trained in European knowledge, notably the gentleman already referred to, and Mr. Bunyu Nanjio, and last (not least) Mr. Takakusu, have, by their published works, added not only to native, but to European knowledge. A very excellently conducted periodical, now called *The Orient*, gives also able expression, in English, to the general Buddhist view of things, and publishes English versions of the texts held in most repute. In the face of the increased importance which recent events have given to the military caste in Japan, a caste devoted almost exclusively to the ancient paganism, the Shinto faith of their ancestors, this activity and zeal of the Buddhists is noteworthy.

In China, in this as in other respects, all is silent; or, if there be any movement, we know nothing of it. Buddhism there has always, in spite of a few intervals of royal favor, had a hard fight against Confucianism; and it lies at present, mostly from internal causes, under a cloud. But it still has a large following among the masses, and even, though they often prefer to conceal the fact, among the wealthier classes; and any revival of Chinese national feeling will have its effect also on the Buddhist communities.

In Siam, on the other hand, the Buddhist advance has the able and efficient support of the ruling family. In emulation, no doubt, and in some respects in imitation, of the Pali Text Society, the work of European scholars, the Buddhist scholars of

*"Le Bouddhisme japonais; doctrines et histoire des douze grandes sectes du Bouddhisme du Japon." Paris, 1889.

Siam—for scholarship has never died out there—have brought out, at the expense and under the patronage of their present enlightened monarch, and under the superintendence of his brother, the distinguished scholar and member of the Buddhist Order, Prince Vajira-nana, a most admirable and now nearly complete edition of the whole of their ancient sacred books, and are beginning, under the same auspices, an edition of the numerous commentaries—all in Pali, of course, but printed, not in the Pali, but in the ordinary Siamese, characters.

In Ceylon, the Buddhists—not without help, be it noted, from American sympathizers—have started new schools, both for boys and girls. They have also inaugurated colleges for the higher education of the Buddhist clergy. And more than one of these colleges, notably in Colombo under the able superintendence of the distinguished scholar Sumangala Maha Nayaka, who is an Honorary Member of the Royal Asiatic Society of England, have produced scholars and organizers who are fully awake to all the necessities of the times. There is a paper there, too, *The Buddhist*, which does for Ceylon what *The Orient* does for Japan; and a native paper, written in Singalese, the *Sava Sanda Rasa*, which is even more important, and has a large and influential circulation.

In India, an organization has been set on foot in Calcutta for the propagation of Buddhist opinion. This owed its commencement to the agency of Ceylon Buddhists, and is at present very ably presided over by a Ceylonese well known in Europe and America, Mr. Dharmapala. But it has received the adhesion and support of influential natives of India. Some of them contribute articles to its journal, the *Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society*, and others have gone to Ceylon to study Buddhism there. A principal object of the association, to obtain possession of the ancient Maha Bodhi temple, erected on the site of the spot where the Buddha obtained Nirvana, has not at present been successful. But the organization is full of life and aspiration, and it seems by no means improbable that it will succeed in spreading to a considerable extent once more in India the faith of the greatest teacher and thinker that India has yet produced.

In Burma Buddhism is at present quieter. Perhaps it is that the Buddhists there feel less than elsewhere the pressure of opposing forces. As Mr. Fielding has shown in that enchanting vol-

ume, "The Soul of a People," Buddhism is in Burma a power, and a power on the whole for good, influencing the lives of the people from the cradle to the grave. And though quiet, it is not quiescent. The press issues an increasing number of Buddhist Texts, old and new. And though the Buddhist peasantry have not yet, from financial causes, succeeded in publishing the whole of the authoritative texts of their religion, the texts they do publish have a wide circulation, and are held in high honor by the people.

There is yet another point which it would be blindness to omit in any estimate of the position of Buddhism as a living force—it is not at all improbable that it may turn out, eventually, to be the most important point of all—the quiet but irresistible way in which Buddhism is making its influence felt, quite apart from any religious propaganda, in the thought of the West. What Schopenhauer said has often been quoted, but will bear quoting again: "If I am to take the results of my own philosophy as the standard of truth, I should be obliged to concede to Buddhism the pre-eminence over the rest. In any case, it must be a satisfaction to me to find my teaching in such agreement with a religion professed by the majority of men." This would be neither the place nor the time to undertake any discussion of this utterance. It is enough to point out that Schopenhauer is, in all probability, the most influential philosopher among those now followed in Germany; and that the influence of Germany, at all events in intellectual matters, is at present, if not indeed in the ascendant, at least exceedingly powerful. It is not probable that any considerable number of people, either in Europe or America, will ever range themselves openly on the side of Buddhism, as a profession of faith. But it cannot be denied that there are certain points in the Buddhist view of life that are likely to influence, and to influence widely, with increasing intensity, the views of life, of philosophy, of ethics, as held now in the West. And not only the view of life, the method also, the system of self-training in ethical culture, has certain points which the practical Western mind is not likely, when it comes to know it, to ignore. The present results have been brought about by the knowledge of Buddhism professed by a few isolated students. It is only when the texts have been properly edited, fully translated, so studied and summarized that they have been made accessible to

every one interested in questions of philosophy and ethics, that the full power of such truth as there is in the Buddhist theory will be felt.

It cannot be considered as at all improbable that the twentieth century will see a movement of ideas not unlike in importance to that resulting from the discovery of Greek thought at the time of the Renaissance, and due, like it, to the meeting together in men's minds of two fundamentally different interpretations of the deepest problems man has to face.

T. W. RHYS DAVIDS.